

USDA – CSREES LISTENING SESSION

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First of all, let me express my deep appreciation for the opportunity to have a voice in these important conversations about the future of food and fiber in the United States.

In my opinion, one of the most significant megatrends impacting our state, the Midwest, as well as the rest of the nation at this point in our history has to do with a demographic shift of proportions unparalleled since the passage of the First Morrill Act in 1862. As an example, since its beginning, the State of Minnesota has had a significant American Indian (11 reservations and communities) and African American presence. In addition, as the state has continued its strong tradition of providing a permanent home for migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from all parts of the United States and the world, the “ethnoscape” of the state has become much more diverse. Although human diversity has always been present in the State of Minnesota, there is no question that the state is currently entering a new era of greater racial and ethnic diversity. This has taken place at a time when other historically excluded and underserved populations are also gaining increased voice and visibility in the social landscape. As a consequence, communities large and small across Minnesota--but most particularly those in the rural areas--are experiencing a significant demographic transformation, making the state into a richer mosaic of races, ages, nationalities, religions, backgrounds, cultures, incomes, abilities, lifestyles, beliefs, and orientations.

How this growing diversity aligns with Minnesota's economy will affect the future quality of life of this state. Already, the state's economy increasingly relies on a diverse workforce. People of color are a growing cornerstone of the workforce in the hospitality industry; horticulture, nursery and landscaping operations; the construction trades; meat and poultry packing; the dairy industry; food and vegetable processing; and many other agriculturally related businesses throughout the state. The “Latinization” of the workforce in the agro-business sector of

I also paid my dues in this regard back in the late 1960's when as a teenager I earned my living, during the summer months, by hoeing and thinning Sugarbeets in the extensive fields of the Red River Valley of Northern Minnesota.

Even though, during those years, I heard about Extension Programs such as 4-H, I never actually participated in them. Extension and I had our first "encounter" only about ten years ago, when I was asked to do some consulting work with the U of M Extension Service in rural Minnesota. It was as a result of these "encounters" that I subsequently came to work full time for the organization some three years ago.

Extension and I missed each other during my growing-up years. I am glad, however, that my experiences with this organization have come to me, in my adult years, and from an Extension organization that is authentically trying to become much more inclusive by intentionally focusing more of its collective work on historically underserved audiences.

In my opinion, the true greatness of the National Cooperative Extension System resides in those important moments in history when it has given concrete form to ideals for building and reinventing a truly "new world." When it has been a source of hope, inspiration, and liberation for the less fortunate, the new immigrant, the disenfranchised, the excluded, the peasant, the powerless, the underserved, and the marginalized segments of our society. When it has contributed meaningfully to the ongoing advancement of our unique experiment in democracy. When it has stood for justice, environmental stewardship, and equality of opportunity in the midst of conflicting priorities and values. When it has promoted a spirit of renewal and given impetus to the sustainable progress of humanity.

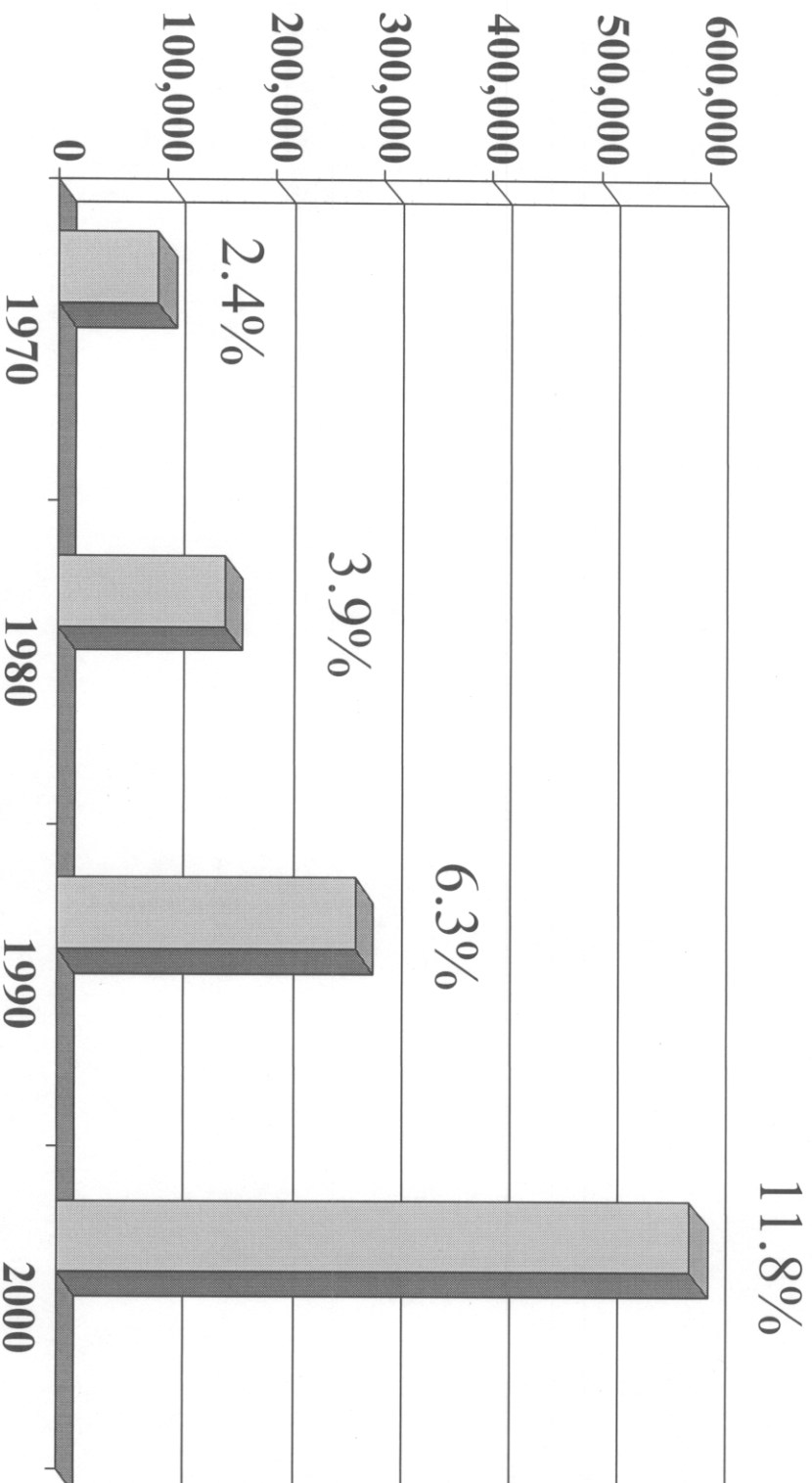
The true friends the National Cooperative Extension System will always want to see it at the forefront of historic transformations, and not as a defender of an "old world" in decline. The times and the clientele have changed, the need for the National Cooperative Extension System has not. Now, more than ever, Extension needs fiscal and human resources--strong core support and focused efforts--that are commensurate with the challenges and opportunities of a new demographic reality in America's breadbasket and beyond.

Thank you very much.

Minnesota Total Minority Population 1970 to 2000

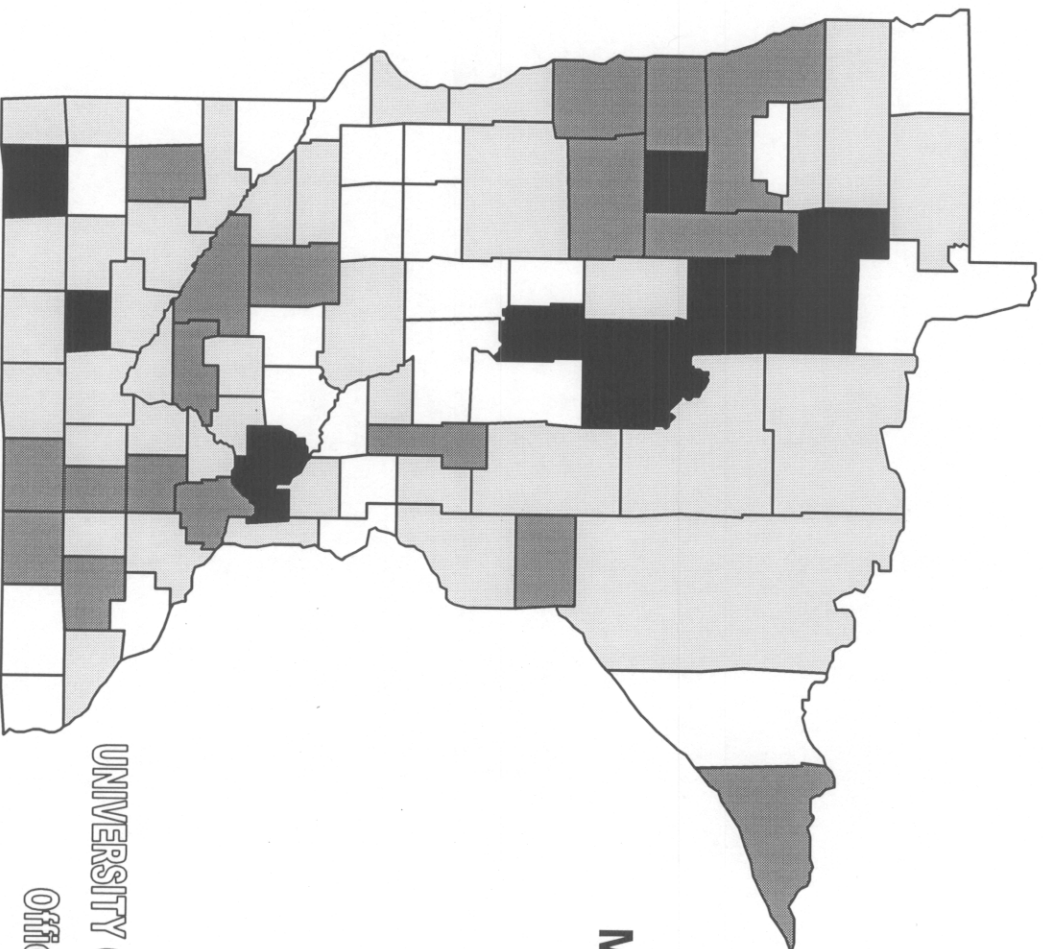
Source: US Census Bureau

University of Minnesota Extension Service, Office of Diversity and Inclusion

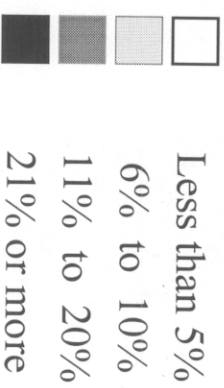


MINNESOTA CHILDREN OF COLOR

Source: 2000 Census Data



Minnesota Total: 18%



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION SERVICE
Office of Diversity and Inclusion

PROFILE OF MINNESOTA MINORITY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Percentages of public school teachers and students, who are African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, American Indian, and Hispanic

| | 1983 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 |
|-------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Minority Teachers | 1.5% | 1.6% | 1.7% | 1.9% | 1.9% | 2.2% | 2.4% | 2.6% | 2.7% | 2.8% |
| Minority Students | 6.5% | 9.7% | 10.1% | 10.4% | 11.2% | 11.9% | 12.6% | 13.5% | 14.4% | 15.2% |

Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning